

Honeylocust

(Sweet Locust, Three-thorned Acacia, Thorn Tree)
(*Gleditsia triacanthos*, L.)

By Coleen Vansant, Information Manager, Alabama Forestry Commission

Known best for its thorny bark and branches, the honeylocust is a broad, flat-topped tree growing 60-80 feet tall with a trunk of 2-3 feet in diameter. The bark is black, rough, and divided into narrow flat plates. The long forked thorns are about 2-3 inches long on the branches and trunk. This tree has a life span of about 120 years.

The leaves are 7-8 inches long and pinnately and bipinnately compound. The leaflets are oval, shiny dark green above, dull yellow-green below, and 1-1 1/2 inches long. Bipinnate leaves have 4-7 pairs of pinnae, each with as many as 28 leaflets.

Honeylocust can have male and female flowers on separate trees or on the same tree, although most have flowers of both sexes. Flowering can begin as soon as 5-10 years.

The fruit is a twisted brown, leathery, flat pod 5-10 inches long. After frost the pods have a sweet juicy pulp that tastes like honey. Because of the pleasant taste, livestock and wildlife forage for them. The young pods are edible for humans when cooked and taste like uncooked peas. The pod twists and re-twists like a corkscrew scattering the seed in winter.



The tree grows in rich soil along streams, bottomlands, and mountain slopes. It also grows well on limestone or high pH soil. It demands plenty of sunlight and is tolerant of transplanting, heat, drought, air pollution, and salt. Honeylocust grows all over Alabama but

is most prevalent in north Alabama. Its habitat extends from Pennsylvania west to southern Minnesota and southwestern South Dakota. It grows as far south as Florida and westward to Texas.

The wood of the honeylocust is very hard, very heavy, strong, stiff, and high in shock resistance. It is hard to work with tools and does not glue well. It has good nail-holding ability but has a tendency to split. It is quite resistant to decay and does not have a characteristic odor or taste.

Honeylocust wood is used for general construction, interior trim, furniture, and crossties. It has become a desirable ornamental tree and it trims easily into a hedge. Historically the wood was used for fence posts, wheel hubs, farm implements, and furniture. The sharp spines were used as pins.

The Alabama Champion honeylocust grows in Baldwin County. It is 114 inches in circumference, 56 feet tall, and has a crown spread of 60.7 feet for a total point value of 185.17. The National Champion is found in Frederick County, Maryland. It has a circumference of 236 inches. It is 114 feet tall and has a crown spread of 93 feet. Its total point value is 373. 🌳



Alabama's TREASURED Forests
513 Madison Avenue
P.O. Box 302550
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-2550

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MONTGOMERY AL
PERMIT NO 109